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LET OTHERS SEE US

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KAMASIK

WHO ARE YOU?

Where are you coming from?
Where will you stop today?
What country are you from?

What is your destination? What is your good name, sir? How far is it from here to America? How many days does it take to get there? How much does a ticket cost? What work do you do? Do you know my friend Mr Bob? He taught us English. Where is your family? What does your father do? You have older and younger brothers and sisters? What do they do? What are your qualifications? How much money do you make? How much land do you have? What crops do you raise? Do you have a cow or a buffalo? Do you eat beef? What pujas do you celebrate in your village? What is your religion? Don't you believe in god? Don't you celebrate Durga Puja? Do you play Holi? Do you have a temple in your village? You have free sex in America? How old are you? Are you married? Why aren't you married? When will you get married? Do you go to the cinema? You will work in our village? Will you teach in our school? Will you teach me English? Do you play football? Do you play cards? Do you gamble? Do you drink rakshi? Do you have cultural programs at schools in America? Do you have village dramas? Do you have a picture of your family? Is it true that it is day in America when it is night in Nepal? I want to see America. I am very poor, but someday I will visit your country. Will you take me with you? Do you drink tea? Let us go to the tea shop to have some tea.

Two glasses of especial tea. No, I will pay. This is my friend, Mr Esteben. He is from America. He is going to teach in our school. Where will you stay? You must meet the Pradhan Panch. He will, with the Headmaster, find you a place to stay. What do you eat? Do you eat rice? Can you eat hot food? Do you like yogurt? Can you eat with your hand? Today, will you take food in my house? We are very poor, we can't offer you good food. Will you come?"

Amidst a crowd of students on the veranda of a school house, resting under a Pipal tree along the trail, stopping for tea at a tea shop in a bazaar village, you will be engaged in conversation by Nepalese curious to know who you are and why you are here. What people will want to know about you will tell you much about what is important to them and what impressions they already have about who you are. The specific content of your answers will be less important than the concern that you show in trying to communicate and your awareness of what is important to someone in Nepal who is offering to share his or her world with you. Serious questions should be answered seriously, but people like to joke with one another everywhere and humor enlivens every situation, but let the jokes be upon yourself until you know who and what is fair game in Nepal.

You may want to throw your resume and your standard introductions away. Where you went to school, what you studied, what books you have read, or movies you have seen, may be meaningless to Nepalese unless they have been to the states to study. Your scholarships and athletic letters, trophies and awards, fraternity or sorority, political party or social circle will convey little of who you are for people for whom these things do not exist. What is important to Nepalese will be reflected in what they want to know about you. Who you are can only be known by where you are, what you are doing, and the frame of reference of the person asking the question.

Beyond the specific content of conversation, look for the categories of what is important, the moral and intellectual frames of reference, the perceptions of the world, and the personal concerns of the persons with whom you communicate. From many conversations specific cultural and social values and institutions will emerge as being more important than others. Family, caste, tribe, land, village, and religion, will be important to most people in Nepal. Whether at ease with tradition or concerned with change, these are aspects of life in Nepal which will be a constant frame of reference. In each area of life, people will be curious about your world as it is perceived through theirs. The more you know of their world the more you will know of how they perceive who you are.

Pride and humility, a cautious concern and a constant reaching out, a fear of the unknown and a curiosity about things new, a respect for the past and a desire to be part of the future, will weave in and out of conversations in response to your questions and answers. As warp and weft, you and the Nepalese will create a picture of each other resulting from your mutual effort to communicate. Nepal is the framework and day to day interactions the content of the picture created.

Will you come? The question may be direct and persistent or only a smile. It may result from sharing a cigarette, a long

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conversation, or an offer of assistance. An invitation to come and have a cup of tea, to share a simple meal of rice and lentils, to be part of a religious ceremony, or move into a home as part of the family, may be seen as ways of repaying you personally for the work that you do as a volunteer. In living and working in Nepal, communication will go beyond conversation, but what is said in conversations will guide you in seeing what is important. Through direct experience, reading, and reflection, strive to comprehend how others see us and how they thus wish to be perceived. When you are asked, "will you come?" you will accept the invitation, you will know what is being offered, and you will have begun to answer the question, "who are you?"



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ASPECTS OF AMERICAN CULTURE: ASSUMPTIONS AND VALUES
THAT AFFECT CROSS-CULTURAL EFFECTIVENESS

by

Edward C. Stewart

Assumptions and Values

The typical person has a strong sense of what the world is really like, so that it is with surprise that he discovers that "reality" is built up out of certain assumptions commonly shared among members of the same culture. Members of other cultures will hold to a different idea of reality since they make different assumptions about the world and their experience in it. Most Americans, for instance, implicitly assume that the world external to themselves and others is physical, material, and does not have a soul or a spirit. The truth of the assumptions may appear to be self-evident, but, in fact, they are not shared by many peoples throughout the non-Western world. Large segments of the peoples throughout South and Southeast Asia endow nature with an essence similar to the one reserved for man by Westerners. It is this assumption which, in part, predisposes Westerners and Americans in particular to exploit the physical environment to their own purposes. Conversely, the Indian or the Southeast Asian finds himself attempting to synthesize or integrate with nature because he assumes that this is the relationship naturally existing. Man is just another form of life and does not possess unique attributes which set him apart from other forms, or even from topographical features of the environment such as a mountain or a valley.

Cultural assumptions may be defined as abstract, organized, and general concepts which pervade a person's outlook and behavior. These same properties of assumptions are not characteristic of behavior, which is concrete, discrete, and specific.

Basic assumptions such as the perception of the self, and the perception of the world, can be inferred from actions of an individual; however, several are usually required to cover fully any particular behavior. Furthermore, these basic perceptions do not inevitably fix the direction in which an individual acts. For example, the middle class American usually thinks of himself as an individual, the world as inanimate, success as his goal, impersonal cooperation with others as desirable, and doing as his preferred activity. Do these assumptions mean that he should

become a business man, or a social worker? Should he take an active part in local politics, or does he confine his political activity to the voting booth? Does he engage in discussion by outlining the main issues before proceeding to details and applications, or does he follow the reverse direction? All of these questions are related to the basic assumptions of the individual and reflect the cultural pattern of American middle class society. They do not, however, directly govern the actions of the individual. Most decisions, actions, and evaluations are considered according to concepts less abstract, less generalized and less organized than the cultural assumptions. For example, most Americans assume that nature is material and exploitable, and this assumption is related to the fact that Americans usually desire material comfort and possessions. People should have shelter, clothing, warmth, and all of the other means that make the individual materially comfortable. It is also desirable and acceptable that the individual have his own car, house and other physical possessions. If an American were to give away all of his possessions, deny himself material comforts, and choose to dress in rags while wandering in the pursuit of spiritual grace, his actions would be more in keeping with the cultural patterns of parts of Asia. In the United States, the individual's behavior would probably be considered as a deviation from the pursuit of material comfort and possessions. Whatever reasons the individual might advance for pursuing the Biblical road to salvation would usually be considered eccentric, for most Americans do not recognize incompatibility between the goal of acquiring material comfort and possessions, and that of leading a good life.

Although everyone knows Americans who are not particularly concerned with physical comfort, it is apparent that material comfort is the dominant pattern when one notes the time, effort, and money expended by Americans on labor-saving devices, comfortable means of transportation, etc. In India, on the other hand, the stress on spiritual grace rather than on material comfort is readily observed. The fundamental difference between the two cultures (or any cultures) is the difference in the stress given each possible set of assumptions and actions.

The distinction between common sense values, and cultural assumptions and values, deserves emphasis. Americans are aware of their own common sense values and readily use them to describe their own actions. Members of a culture, however, are not necessarily aware of the assumptions and values which systematically describe their behavior. These are inferences made by the social scientist, about which the individual does not have to be articulate. The only requirement is that the behavior of the individual be describable according to the assumptions and values. As a matter of fact, awareness of the cultural underpinnings of behavior ranges from the very explicit to the implicit. The

assumptions in particular are not likely to be acknowledged by members of a culture. Being fundamental to the individual's outlook, they are likely to be considered as part of the real world and therefore remain unquestioned.

General Perception of the Self (Individual)

The concept of the individual self is an integral assumption of American culture, so deeply ingrained that Americans ordinarily do not question it. They naturally assume that each person has his own separate identity which should be recognized and stressed. Since this cultural assumption is implicit and outside of the awareness of Americans, the nature of the self-identity is somewhat elusive. By comparing the "who-am-I" concept across cultures, however, it is found that Americans perceive themselves in the broad terms of a human being of a particular sex. When a more specific identity is given, it is likely to be in terms of a social role (e.g. husband), identification with one's own generation (teen-ager, middle-aged), and the achievements of the individual. This general perception of the self allows the American considerable freedom of choice in his actions--in contrast to narrower self-definitions of individuals from other cultures, which may include such considerations as caste, religion, rank, or class. Any one of these may take precedence over the more general factors Americans use to define identity. The self may be given an overly-narrow definition by occupation (professor, soldier) or by family (a Smith, a Dunlap), or the primary consideration in defining the self may be locale or ethnic group (a village, a particular tribe). The narrower the perception of the self, the more precisely delineated will be the types of contact the individual will have with others, including people from other nations. His social interactions will seem to be set and unchanging, while his ability to be practical in choosing courses of action will seem limited.

Man as Separate from Nature

For the American, the perception of the self as a distinct entity provides a vantage point from which to view the world. It implies, also, a clear separation between man, on the one hand, and nature and all other forms of life, on the other. Man's quality of humanness endows him with a value absent in all other forms of life: he is unique because of his soul. Nature and the physical world, although referred to as living, are conceived as material and mechanistic. But this view is not universal. Man is not deemed a unique being in all cultures, for to many of the people of the non-Western world, he is just another form of life, differing from others only in degree. Nature is alive and animistic. Animals and even inanimate objects have their own essence. Hence in parts of the non-Western world, no dividing line separates man from plants, rocks, rivers, mountains, and valleys. Hindus and Buddhists believe that life itself

continues in endless cycles in which a soul can assume an infinity of forms. During one cycle, the soul may inhabit the form of a man, and in another take a different form, that of an animal, perhaps, or an insect (Arensberg and Niehoff 1964).

Characteristics of Personal Relations

Personal relationships among Americans are numerous and are marked by friendliness and informality; however, Americans rarely form deep and lasting friendships. Friends and membership groups change easily as the American shifts status or locale; consequently, his social life lacks both permanence and depth (C. Kluckhohn 1954, p. 96). Although social activities occupy much of his time, he avoids personal commitments to others. He does not like to get involved. A social act such as an invitation or offered gift is accepted and thanks are expressed. The recipient is not under obligation to reciprocate, although there is present the vague propriety of a return gesture. This social pressure, however, does not have the binding and formal quality of social obligations evident in other cultures. Americans usually prefer to pursue their social life under conditions that minimize incurring social obligations. Gifts, for instance, are customarily given to commemorate a birthday, an anniversary, or a festival such as Christmas. Outside of these well-established occasions, circumspection is observed so that giving a gift appears personally anonymous and its significance is carefully limited to avoid a personal meaning that might be construed as a bribe, seeking special favors, or as requiring reciprocity. In the activity of work, anonymity is commonly achieved by collecting donations from interested people, then awarding the gift to commemorate a specific departure, anniversary, or retirement.

The circumspection with which social relations are handled in the United States, so as to avoid social obligations, is in direct contrast with conventions in most parts of the world. The American "Thank you; I had a fine time," is insufficient recompense for an evening's invitation. The guest may be expected to bring flowers as in Germany. And for the non-Westerner, the American's vague feeling that a return gesture is appropriate may be replaced by an importunate obligation.

One solution to social obligations, the Dutch treat, may seem crass to non-Americans, who prefer the convention of individuals taking turns in being the host in what might be called sequential reciprocity.

In other cultures, the American convention of anonymity in giving gifts is often seen to deprecate the meaning of the act. If the gift does not inconvenience or deprive the donor it has less meaning for the recipient. And when the American is successful in bestowing a well-received gift, he may be deprived of

the "thanks" which is mandatory in his culture. In parts of India the expression for "thanks" does not exist, and social conventions have not required its invention. A social act is seen as the fulfillment of an obligation or a duty which requires no verbal acknowledgement. If the action, as in offering a gift, is not the consequence of an obligation, thanks would still be inappropriate. To imply termination of social interchange by an overt expression of thanks places a finite value on the gift and cheapens its meaning.

Equality

Running throughout the American's social relationships with others is the theme of equality. Each person is ascribed an irreducible value because of his humanness. "We're all human, after all." Interpersonal relations are typically horizontal, conducted between presumed equals. When a personal confrontation is required between two persons of different hierarchical levels, there is an implicit tendency to establish an atmosphere of equality. Thus even within the definitive authoritarian structure of the military, a commanding officer may ask a subordinate a personal question or offer a cup of coffee before beginning a conversation. Furthermore, the officer is not expected to call attention to his rank and authority or exercise his personal power over a subordinate. One mark of a good officer, from the enlisted man's point of view, is that he does not "pull rank" or "use his authority as a crutch." In short, the good officer promotes a feeling of equality, the preferred social mode among Americans.

Discussing equality in the context of Americans working abroad, Mead says that:

Americans . . . find it very confusing to shift from high to low status as the situation demands and . . . respond by a continuous endeavor to stabilize relationships. Their uneasiness often leads to an assertive attempt either to establish a superficially egalitarian ethos--as in the ritual use of first names for everyone, which is most disorienting to persons of many other cultures--or else to an attempt to establish hierarchies which are rigidly resistant to other considerations such as lineage and education. (Mead 1963, pp. 7-8)

It is clear that his cultural values predispose the American to function most effectively on an interpersonal level of equality. He is often confused when confronted with persons of a different status--particularly when it has been achieved through a legacy of special privileges. The ideal of equality makes it difficult for the American to understand hierarchical patterns of organization overseas, with the consequence that he tends to ignore political questions. He usually does not

consider the fact that the loyalty of members of an organization may be the primary principle that explains otherwise unintelligible actions and promotions. Noting the absence of an emphasis on both achievement and equality, Americans may often fail to recognize the characteristics which determine who are the opinion-and decision-makers.

For instance, that impoverished aristocrats or ascetic priests, beggarly in dress and looks, can still command respect and allegiance, despite their lack of outward signs of visible achievement and "success," is a difficult concept for Americans to grasp. (Arensberg and Niehoff, 1964, p. 135)

Comparative Judgments

As a technician or advisor, the American overseas almost invariably judges the local society by his standards of material comfort, defined in the broad sense including physical comfort and health. He perceives his work to be congruent with his values and attempts to improve the health and promote the welfare of the local people, forgetting that the simple hygienic practices--sanitary toilets, vaccines, etc.--cannot be easily demonstrated to be effective in maintaining health. The American himself probably accepts them as part of his culture, rather than on the basis of their demonstrated effectiveness. Quite often sophisticated observations and successive measurements over a period of time are required to make obvious the advantages of health measures.

The propensity to make twofold judgments is interrelated with the American tendency to see the world in terms of black or white, and in the American character, at any rate, it is related to a predisposition to action. That is in part due to the fact that the dichotomies which Americans set up are unequal: one element is usually valued more than the other. This characteristic can be seen in the following common dichotomies: work-play, good-evil, peace-war, military-civilian, right-wrong, successful-unsuccessful, and man-nature. These polarities simplify the view of the world, predispose to action, and provide Americans with their typical method of evaluating and judging by means of a comparison. This last point is so pervasive that it deserves elaboration.

The American advisor in Southeast Asia is likely to evaluate his counterparts according to the norms of the U.S. and to decide accordingly that they are better, the same, or worse. He is likely to give advice on the same basis: "You should do thus-and-thus because that is the way it is done in America." The implicit American standard is used throughout for making estimates and justifying advice. It may well be that his comparative basis of evaluation is what gave rise to the opinion

that Americans believe whatever is American is superior. Although this view has to be reckoned with by Americans going overseas, it may not be a completely fair opinion. In part it may reflect the comparative basis of judgment, which can be seen in any area of American life. The American resists describing or judging something in terms of itself, or in its own context. Instead he insists on a comparison. He evaluates himself against others like himself; he judges a movie against other movies he has seen; he judges his children against the norm for their age; and then most naturally, he judges other people against Americans. The evaluation of "good because" is more naturally rendered as "good as."

The constant mention of American values, or of previous experience of the advisor, may well aggravate the position of the advisor or consultant, which is a delicate one at best. Regardless of the American's attitude, his very presence suggests that he has knowledge or skills that the local people do not have. The American, by his mere presence, is already precariously near to suggesting implicitly that he is "better" than the local people; and when he evaluates and justifies through a comparison with American norms, he may be laying the groundwork for a reputation of arrogance.

Americans, then, tend to perceive the world in dichotomies and to evaluate and justify by means of comparisons, which usually suggests that the standard of comparison is better. It is perhaps this tendency which has contributed to the American reputation for moralizing. Whenever Americans observe graft, unusual sexual behavior, cruelty, or a different way of leading or of planting a crop, they tend to make comparisons on the basis of their conception of American behavior in a similar context. They subsequently arrive at a judgment of good or bad, which may mean immoral in one instance or "it doesn't work" in another. The American usually does not take into account the fact that what he observes overseas is the behavior of members of another culture. He makes a direct comparison and draws a conclusion from it, whereas a Chinese, for example, is likely to say "that is American," rather than "that is bad." Completely oriented to the situation, the Chinese might judge the context to be inappropriate and thus avoid labeling it as bad. The implication would be that at the proper place and time it would not be bad. In the words of an anthropologist, comparing the American and the Chinese,

The usual Chinese description of things American is that they are different; but the usual American view of the Chi-
ness is that they do everything in the wrong way. (Hsu.
1953).

[Excerpted from: Guidelines for Peace Corps Cross-Cultural Training by Center for Research and Education, Estes Park, Colorado, 1970.]

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A HIPPIE WOMAN

-- Abhi Subedi

The suavity you wear
in your mauve clothes
is ours;
the red beads you wear,
the impression of your
equipoised buttocks' and bosom's
outlines over a sari and blouse
are ours;
the odds and ends you collect
are ours.
But the harmony and satisfaction
you derive from
the odd combinations
is yours.

"HIPPY" IS A NEPALI WORD

The Flower Child movement of the 60's had perhaps a greater and longer-lasting impact on Nepal than on the States. When the Beatles went to meditate with the Maharishi, they were quickly followed by a still continuing stream of westerners to India and Nepal. Kathmandu became a haven for those not only on drugs and out of money, but for those rich enough to set up meditation centers, pursue independent research projects and literary works. The impact on the old bazaar area of Kathmandu made it a tourist attraction for Nepalese and foreigners alike. The word "hippy" has come into common usage throughout Nepal to describe any foreigner not in a business suit. What the word hippy means to a Nepali, how they identify one, and what expectations they have concerning personal interactions with someone so identified, can become important to the volunteer trying to avoid being stereotyped.

Showing up in the old bazaar and along the trails with flowing hair and full beards, and in eclectic costumes, the required beads and chillum from India, and a backpack, the hippies were a protest against western values and a vivid visual impression on the Nepalese. What was protest then has now become high fashion among the rich world travellers in their tailored jeans and gold jewelry. For the volunteer to dress well according to the standard set by Nepalese for an individual working in a particular job is more than just respect for local tradition; it sets the volunteer apart from the casual world traveler or hippy and thus affects social as well as work relations.

This visual impression was given great elaboration in the very popular Hindi picture "Hari Krishna Hari Ram." Filmed in Nepal and purporting to give a view of hippy life in Kathmandu, the picture, in a melodramatic song and dance format, presented hippy life as one of drugs, sex, crime, and passion. While the embassy and aid missions are confined to the Kathmandu valley and contact with a limited strata of Nepali society, with few exceptions the volunteer in the field must assert his or her own identity against preconceptions created by the tourist and the Hindi cinema.

The tourist continues to be largely ignorant of Nepali economic systems; paying whatever is asked, bargaining where prices are fixed, and occasionally in a drug induced state simply walking out without paying at all. Handicrafts are ordered

and then never collected or are not ready upon departure time, leading to horrendous arguments. Trekking parties have been known to burn their equipment over disagreements on its disposal after a mountain climb. Careless disregard for valuables has led to theft of valuable art objects on one side and cameras and watches and money on the other. Knowing Nepali and when, where, and how to bargain or not bargain for goods and services, sets the volunteer apart from the tourist and becomes critical not only to make ends meet on a Peace Corps budget, but helps to establish the volunteer as a knowledgeable member of the community who can be trusted.

A considerable number of Nepali men not only in Kathmandu and Pokhara, but along the well travelled trekking routes, claimed to have had casual sexual relations with tourists. This often includes villages where volunteer women must work. The persistent belief in Nepal that sex is free in the West has been encouraged by tourism. Free from the watchful eye of parents and the home community, persons in a foreign land are known to indulge their fancies in sex. That members of the opposite sex might travel together and share the same hotel room without the relationship being sexual is difficult to Nepalese to believe. For a woman in Nepal to be seen alone with a man not a member of her own family is grounds for suspicion and to enter a man's room alone may mean the end of her reputation. Sensitivity to Nepali attitudes towards Nepali women and their preconceptions of foreign women leaves the volunteer woman walking a tightrope in both her work and personal life as she tries to set an example for other women in Nepal of how a woman may actualize her own potential in a changing world without losing the respect of the more conservative members of society. The male volunteer must likewise overcome many suspicions concerning his attitudes and behavior regarding Nepali women. As meaningful interactions and communication between the sexes in Nepal is confined in great measure to family relationships, living with a family and thus becoming someone's brother, sister, aunt, or uncle is often the best way to communicate with people socially.

The word hippy has entered the Nepali vocabulary and the concept may at times be applied to any foreigners including volunteers. It is a first impression which will remain or change according to the actions of volunteers. "Hippy Woman," by a well-known Nepali poet, reflects a more whimsical and sophisticated understanding of the phenomenon as observed without the undesirable connotations often implied. Knowing what appearances may lead to the designation "hippy," and the implications thereof, lets the volunteer make choices.

S.T.E.

PCV ADJUSTMENT PROBLEMS IN NEPAL

by

Shirley Furst

For seven years, I have had the privilege of working with Peace Corps Volunteers as a nurse, which has given me the unique opportunity to know them in a situation where they needed and wanted help. Many times the nature of the help was as much or more emotional support as physical cure. This has afforded me the opportunity to gain considerable insight into the effects of the pressures of being a Peace Corps Volunteer. Much has been written about this, and most of us have read it and can objectively discuss the subject. Everyone recognizes and accepts the responsibility we all have for providing this kind of support. In an effort to assess the degree to which Volunteers in Nepal are getting or needing this kind of support, I began this survey.

In Kathmandu, I had seen PCVs ask for and receive assistance to work out their personal adjustment problems. Many of them gave indications that the decision to seek help was a difficult one that they only reached after trying all other methods of relief. Some viewed the request for help itself as a final admission of defeat and had to be helped to even admit they wanted help. In short, the route to seeking someone with whom to talk over their problems was one they were reluctant to take.

Why was this true? Because of an inherent desire to solve one's own problems? Because to admit difficulties was to admit failure or run the risk of being considered a poor Volunteer? Because they didn't realize help would be given and therefore didn't ask for it?

In order to evaluate the situation and attempt to take the topic of emotional support out of the realm of the objective and make it Nepal specific and subjective, I began to collect the Volunteers' points of view. Over the past three months, I've spent between 8-16 hours each with thirty Volunteers at their posts. Another forty to fifty have been interviewed in Dheras and in Kathmandu for a minimum of two hours each. Some of the references are taken from people I've been involved with before the conception of this project. The interview technique was very relaxed and open-ended. I would state my purpose briefly, ask for their cooperation, and then let the conversation flow.

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Single Men

The Volunteer goes into his village semi-skilled in three areas: language, work and cross-cultural adaptation. In none of these does he feel adequate, nor will he for some time. During that adjustment period, which is highly variable depending on the individual, he is in the position of a man trying to identify his own reflection from a crowd of people looking into rippling water. He can't find himself anywhere in the crowd, because all the images are blurred. He knows he's there somewhere, but the reflection is so different than the mirror he's used to, that he just can't identify his own individual self. Until he's able to jump above the crowd, or work his way to the front of it, or pick out the reflection of others around him and thereby locate himself, he is subject to several uncomfortable and unfamiliar feelings. These are common to all; only the degree varies.

In the early weeks, the prevailing uncomfortable feelings are based on various fears, primarily fear of not being accepted and fear of loss of identity. This results in a constant state of embarrassment and ill ease. No act is performed with comfort and assurance. The only safety is behind his own door and even that is rarely arranged from the first day. With the dictum to "make friends" his wish for privacy to relax only makes him feel guilty, because it means being rude. Consequently, his waking hours are spent in a state of tension and self-doubt from which there is no escape. This is the time when a few resign basically out of fear that they will never make it and they'd rather face the possible disapproval of their friends than suffer another day.

Gradually, some area becomes easier--language improves so the Volunteer is more certain of what is going on and can respond to it. He finds one friend to whom he can relate enough to feel less alone, or the family he lives with begins to take him more for granted and treat him less like a pet and conversation piece. For some PCVs, their first relief is in the job. Teaching becomes more routine, students more manageable; ag. demonstrations actually start looking good; a farmer shows interest in their information; villagers show up for work on a water project; someone decides he wants to get into fish production.

None of these are major breakthroughs, but at least a sign that maybe he really can become a real person with a purpose for being there.

For a few the worst is over. Whether due to the location of his post, his skill and assurance at his job, a stronger grip on his own identity and worth, or a combination of these; at this

point all that remains is to build on his self-confidence and let it spread to all areas of his life and work.

For others this creates a temporary euphoria, and a bigger jump is necessary before his self-image clears. The glimpse he had of himself again blurs, and he's subject to new and bigger doubts based on fear of failure and for some a frighteningly deeper loss of identity. The initial breakthrough in the job either fails or regresses; interest was only curiosity; supplies are unavailable; only one or two students really want to learn; and change in the school system seems impossible. That first friend only wanted to use his things or show him off as a status symbol. The family expects him to be like them and live within their rules of behavior which may be more of a loss of independence than it is a support and protective coloration. In spite of better language, people ask the same old questions and relationships remain polite and superficial.

At this point, he throws himself into the job as the one area where he feels he has any control. "Just work hard enough and I'll prove my worth to them and myself." For some, fisheries and teachers, for example, this may be the road to self-satisfaction--their jobs are more defined and measurable. For most ag. volunteers it just means getting deeper and deeper into areas that they know less and less about. They are trying to pit their shallow knowledge against an age-old cultural pattern, trying to demonstrate their new gospel within a system that rarely provides the material supports necessary for success. The result of this is bound to be at least frustration; at the most, anger and guilt which will be turned against either themselves or the Nepalis.

Again, for some, the hard work pays off, perhaps due as much to their post or job as to their effort, and they "find themselves" in work-related friends and situations. They begin to feel respected and find people to respect. They can begin to relax and really feel "at home." They have the confidence to make necessary changes in their living situation to suit their needs for privacy or independence. They feel free to accept or reject companionship on the basis of personal preference rather than need.

This pleasant resolution of their discomforts is primarily available in the more structured and measurable jobs and a rare few ag. posts. For them, the comfortable plateau has been reached; they know they can "make it"; their need to produce and succeed to their own satisfaction has been demonstrated.

Unfortunately, too many others find that the job problems are essentially insurmountable. This may be due to several factors. The post may truly not be a fertile field; the PCV's

skills may not be up to the demands or he may not believe them to be. The PCV may have very little motivation to work and after an energetic gesture, he decides nothing can be done and settles back to do as little as possible. Whatever the cause of his mediocre accomplishment for an effort to "get into the job" the result for the person is a feeling of dissatisfaction and guilt. No matter how liberated he thinks himself from the "Puritan work ethic," the guilt and self-condemnation for "not doing enough" is a burden he has to struggle with. Again, this is a time when a few more decide to resign, usually angry with themselves, disgusted with Peace Corps and discouraged with Nepal.

For those who elect to remain and try to deal with the frustrating and guilt-producing situation, there are three routes that they seem to take. One is to decide that only so much job satisfaction is available to him, so he'll do what is necessary to fulfill the minimum requirement and find his fuller satisfaction elsewhere. He still feels guilt, if he or someone else measures his contribution by American standards. Basically, however, he has decided that this judgment of the situation is correct, and he avoids outside judgment by putting up a show when necessary. Otherwise, he settles into a life of minimal work and maximum exploration of other interests. These other interests may be egocentric such as reading, music, trekking, meditation, or writing, with a reasonable accommodation to the Nepali surroundings with a few acquaintances and perhaps one or two people he would call friends. He knows he's not disliked by his villagers, his work is not criticized by his Nepali co-workers, and he's getting a lot of pleasure from his personal activities. His life is in pretty even balance, and if any guilt feelings arise, he can squelch them by saying, "There's nothing I can do about it." If anyone doesn't like it, it's because "They don't understand my situation."

Another route to emotional equilibrium that a few PCV's take is to strive to get as deep into the Nepali culture around them as possible. They too have settled for a less than full job satisfaction but decided to counterbalance that by really "getting into Nepal." This sounds like more of a "Peace Corps" thing to do, and perhaps it does give the person a much fuller and more broadening experience. However, it's harder and more demanding, because he ultimately has to return to himself to process all the new reflections he's getting. While the originally introverted route allows the person to have a love affair with himself, the extroverted route involves having a love affair with Nepal. As in all love affairs he is constantly asking himself, "Am I measuring up? If not, why not? What's wrong with me?" Until he becomes assured of his acceptance, he's very insecure and tentative. Sometimes he's scared and hurt; other times he's on top of the world. Eventually he has tested himself and Nepal, and they can begin to live together

in comfort, affection and mutual support. This person is then perhaps ready to have another look at the job aspect of his life and decide to give it another harder try.

The last route taken by a very few is to withdraw themselves from any commitment to Nepal or the job and simply exist here until their time is up or they're asked to leave. They feel guilty about it but figure "if they catch me, o.k.; if they don't, o.k." They aren't overly uncomfortable, or they would decide to leave or behave in such an obvious manner that they'd be noticed and asked to leave. Actually, some do just that, but this reference is to the ones who just hang around doing as they please. Except for a small twinge of guilt and an uneasy feeling that no one cares about them enough to notice what they're up to, they're not unhappy. Since there are so few people who fall into this category, and they're not doing any harm to themselves or Nepal, one might consider just ignoring them in a discussion of PCV problems. However, they appear to have a demoralizing effect on the other PCVs who are struggling to fulfill their commitments in some way, and therefore should be reviewed.

The other manifestation of that same route is the person who acts out his withdrawal of concern or commitment in such obvious ways that everyone, including himself, breathes a sigh of relief when he's finally requested to leave. Whether this person is fully aware of what he's doing and proceeds to flaunt every rule until he's noticed, or is unknowingly progressing into more and more bizarre emotional behavior, the cause of the problem is the same. The pressure has become more than he is able or willing to bear and he's afraid to admit failure (or what he interprets as failure). He is begging someone to say, "I'll help you by removing the responsibility for admitting anything by telling you to go home."

Naturally, given the variation in people, the degree to which each one will react to his adjustment in Nepal is essentially unpredictable. However, it is safe to predict that almost everyone will pass through the same set of emotions--only the intensity will vary. For the sake of a simplified outline, it can be put thus:

1. Fear of not being accepted
 - A. Embarrassment
 - B. Awkwardness
2. Fear of loss of identity as an independent entity
3. Fear of failure
 - A. Futility
 - B. Inadequacy
4. Anger
 - A. At self
 - B. At staff
 - C. At Nepal

5. Pleasure
 - A. Job success
 - B. Self-knowledge and acceptance
 - C. Social comfort
6. Accommodation to realities of job and other satisfactions
 - A. Self-assuredness
 - B. Contentment
 - C. Guilt
7. Fear of returning home
 - A. Responsibility to past role
 - B. Unsure of new self in old setting
 - C. Reluctance to follow old goals

One large area of concern to volunteers, mentioned several times, deserves a more thorough explanation. That is "fear of loss of identity." This too varies according to the individual's emotional state, but it is safe to expect everyone to suffer it at some time. During the early months, or until he gets secure in some area of his life, he cannot find any reflection that assures him of who or what he is, because this culture does not react to him in any of the ways that he is accustomed to. Take, for example, the question of sexual identity. In a male-oriented society, one would assume that would not be a problem, but in fact it is. Here, a man, especially a foreign man, must get his evidence of maleness from other men almost exclusively. Even when female companionship is possible, it is transitory, secretive and emotionally shallow. He is essentially cut off from any familiar male-female relationships. However, he is expected to establish male-male relationships on a more intimate and demonstrative basis than he is used to. For most, this causes a short term, vague discomfort that volunteers are able to deal with rationally. They become comfortable, even pleased, to find that they can enjoy a less restrictive association with other men. For a few others, it precipitates a mild crisis of guilt and questioning of themselves--"If I'm really a man, how can I enjoy holding hands with another man?" For some this feeling of self-doubt persists throughout their Peace Corps time and becomes a question they must resolve either by experimentation or professional help when they go home. The extent of this crisis, which might peak and require attention any time during Peace Corps service, depends on several factors: the strength of his male ego, the extent of his exploration with other men, and the occasions for counterbalancing his experiences with satisfactory female companionship. The extreme of this crisis is the man whose own male ego is so weak that the normal expressions of male friendship in this culture are so threatening that he becomes suspicious, frightened and eventually psychotic as a result of his own guilt and confusions. Fortunately, this extreme is very rare. However, milder forms of it do occur and cause great uncertainty and concern to the men going through it.

I've used the specific example of "sexual identity crisis" both to describe it as an actual factor that exists among PCVs and as an illustration of a larger and more vague fear of loss of identity as a unique entity, that affects everyone. Until they become secure in some area and can read the reactions of the people around them, they live with the uneasy and frightening feeling that "they don't know that I'm another human being." This can lead to anger, and until some response comes from someone that demonstrates their acceptance as a unique person, they feel very hostile and bitter towards Nepalis.

If the PCV is following in the footsteps of another PCV, particularly if the previous one was the first at that post or extended, he finds himself fighting to establish his identity not only in a strange environment but also against the pattern of another American. This doubles the struggle, because instead of people who view him as an oddity that they know nothing about, they treat him as a familiar object that they know everything about.

The final stage of discomfort that many PCVs find themselves in is generally milder than the others, but still may be something he'd like to talk about before he leaves here. This usually revolves around the question, "How do I fit my new self into the old situation?" Frequently this means: "I don't want to go back to the old role but I feel guilty about disappointing the folks back home." They have come through a period of personal growth that has frequently greatly changed their outlook on themselves, life, home, future--all the things that people at home expect them to have settled when they return. It fact, for many, those questions are more unsettled than when they came here. What they need and want is a chance to test their new selves in their own culture to see where it now best fits. Not being ready to "settle down" and thereby cause confusion and disappointment to those who have been patiently waiting while they "have their fling," gives many another bout of guilt and ill-ease.

Single Females

Everything that has been said about single males can be said about females only more so. While a man in this society can eventually find himself in it by virtue of male mobility and relative independence here, a single, foreign female living alone has no such luck. For her, there is no avenue for expressing or satisfying her social or sexual needs in any acceptable manner. While Nepali culture provides great support and protection for its own women, because they have a specific place and role in it, there is no provision for the outside female. Consequently, her chances of getting to feel "at home" and find herself in the crowd are very slim. Her feelings of fear, lack of acceptance, loss of identity, futility, and failure are more

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intense and harder to overcome than those of most men. Since she knows she's in a difficult situation and has come determined to prove to herself and everyone else that she's "strong enough to take it," it's even harder for her to face and deal with evidence that perhaps she can't do it. She will suffer longer and perhaps risk greater emotional damage before asking for help than many men will. Her need for understanding and help to talk over her feelings is frequently intense but her fear of failure prevents her from openly admitting that need.

Of course, there are some women who do overcome and become quite contented with their jobs and lives here. That is frequently due to a location where more sophisticated female companionship is available, the proximity of other Westerners, the association with a compatible Nepali family, or a combination of any of these. Another important element observed in the more adjusted girls is a genuine enjoyment of the pastimes of Nepali women--handiwork, cooking, making small talk, children. For the average American Peace Corps woman, these diversions are far from the ways that she would choose to spend all her free time. Therefore, her association with Nepali women is doomed to be superficial and boring. Any but work-related and very impersonal relationships with Nepali men is out of the question. Open association with Western men in any degree of privacy or familiarity ruins her reputation in the village. She must live in essential loneliness and with a feeling of not belonging anywhere. If she cannot become sufficiently satisfied that the job alone is worth the effort, her chances of remaining on her post in any happiness are very slim.

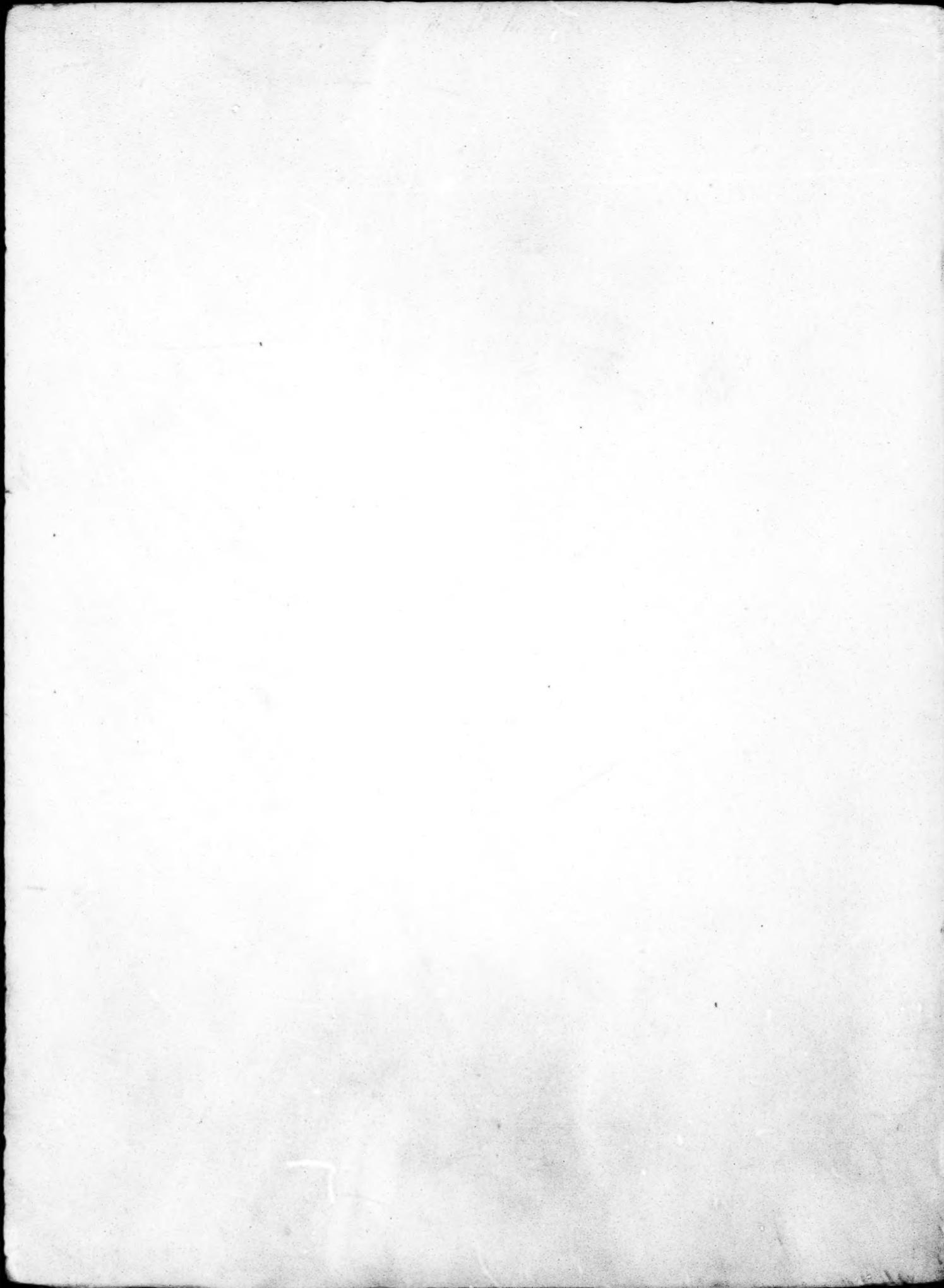




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and foolish notion...

Robert Burns, 1786





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